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# The spur goad from Skegrie in Scania, Sweden

## Evidence of elite interaction between Viking Age Scandinavians and Western Slavs

By Leszek Gardela, Kamil Kajkowski & Bengt Söderberg

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The present paper focuses on a small metal artefact discovered in 2008 during archaeological excavations that preceded the construction of the E6 road leading from Trelleborg to Vellinge in Scania, Sweden. The object under consideration is a copper-alloy goad which originally formed part of a very particular type of Viking Age spurs known from the West Slavic area, predominantly from modern-day Poland. Spurs of this kind are lavishly decorated with animal motifs, probably referring to pre-Christian Slavic mythology, and it is argued that they were emblematic objects used by West Slavic militarized elites which emerged in the turbulent time of state formation in the late tenth and eleventh centuries AD. Due to their rich symbolic content, probably manifesting distinct group identity of their owners, it is highly unlikely that the zoomorphic spurs would have served as objects of trade and exchange. Therefore, the goad discussed in this paper is seen not as a foreign “import” but as important evidence of cultural interaction between the representatives of the highest echelons of Scandinavian and West Slavic societies.

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### Introduction

During the years 2006 to 2008 a series of archaeological excavations were undertaken in connection with the building of a new E6 freeway leading from Trelleborg to Vellinge in south-west Scania, Sweden. Systematic metal detection was an important part of the project and a number of non-ferrous artefacts were collected from settle-

ments along the road (Svensson & Söderberg 2009).

The richest and by far most varied find material was collected at an open field close to the old village of Skegrie (fig. 1). One of the finds, a broken copper alloy bar with a horse figurine was particularly puzzling. Although the motif was familiar,

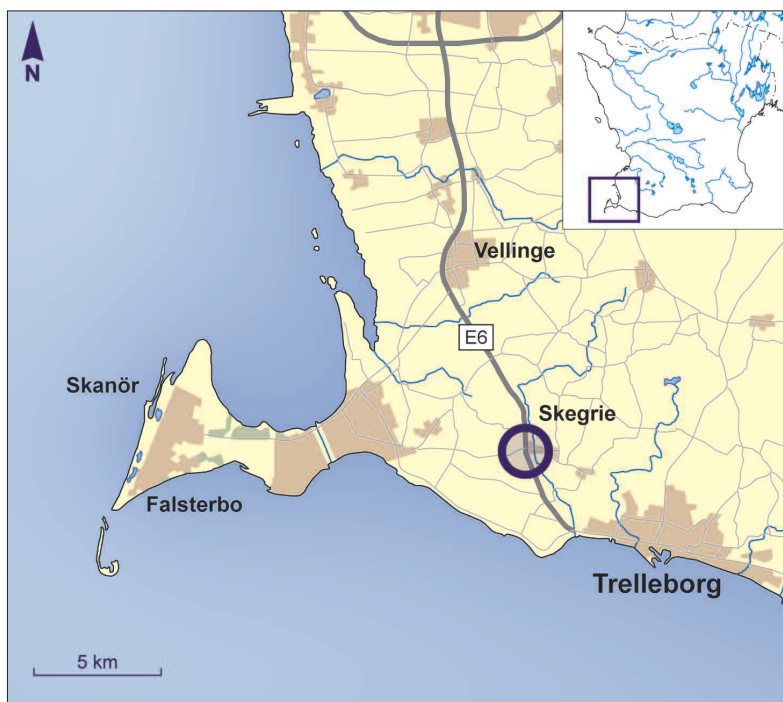


Fig. 1. The E6 freeway and Skegrie. Map by Henrik Pihl, The Archaeologists, National Historical Museums.

nobody had seen anything quite like it. In the excavation report a suggestion was put forward that it was some kind of horse equipment, possibly a part of a bridle (Söderberg 2014, pp. 76). Ten years later, Polish archaeologists noticed the excavation report, made contact and revealed the function and West Slavic origin of the find, which will be discussed in this paper.

It turned out that the artefact is a spur goad. It takes the form of a c. 50 millimetre long and six millimetre thick rounded bar, slightly oval in section (fig. 2). One end is broken and the terminal of the other end is marked with two shallow lines encircling the bar. At the broken end there is a round knob, c. 10 millimetre in diameter, decorated with encircling interlacing ornamentation. On top of the bar a stylized, c. 15 millimetre long and 13 millimetre high, four-footed animal figurine – most likely a horse – is mounted, with its head turned back. In connection with the conservation of the find back in 2008 at the Lund University Historical Museum, a digital x-raying of the object was carried out, showing that the bar consists of an iron core which is coated with cop-

per alloy. The iron core is visible at the broken end of the bar (fig. 3).

#### *Find circumstances and setting*

The goad was found together with a concentration of finds (Scandinavian dress-ornaments and jewellery, Arabic coins and weights) in the plough soil. The settlement remains mainly consisted of sunken huts and a couple of rather small or ordinary post-built houses, altogether buildings of a complementary kind. Evidently a large part of the settlement, including the main buildings, was situated outside the trench. The excavated features represented one or two large farms, dating from c. AD 600–1000.

In some of the sunken huts military equipment such as arrow heads and a lance head was found, but also defensive weapons such as mail rings and a carefully forged caltrop with barbs. A couple of finds were connected to the horse and rider: bits, buckles, a spur (of a simple kind), and a horse shoe. Some of the artefacts, for example an oriental mount and a banded whetstone, are rarely found in Scania, suggesting that the goad



Fig. 2. The spur goad from Skegrie (LUHM 31839: 262). Photo: Bengt Almgren, Lund University Historical Museum.



Fig. 3. A close-up of the spur goad from Skegrie, showing the iron core. Photo: Bengt Almgren, Lund University Historical Museum.

was not the only evidence of interaction with people from distant regions.

The notion that the trench was situated in the periphery of the settlement was enhanced when a ditch was found, marking the short side of a large, rectangular plot. The cadastral map from the year 1700 shows that most of the 23 farms in the village were situated in a straight row at a short distance to the east of a cluster of buildings with the medieval parish church and a couple of farms, suggesting that Skegrie may have been organized as a bipartite estate, with a manor and village. The cluster corresponds to the reconstructed plot, with the church in a central position. The layout resembles the sites of Lisbjerg and Haldum in Jutland, palisaded or fenced in Viking Age magnate's

farms. At Lisbjerg the centrally situated, main building – the hall – was replaced with a wooden church and, sometime later, with a stone built church (Jeppesen 2014). Thus, the plot at Skegrie is suggested to represent an eleventh-twelfth century magnate's farm with a wooden church (Söderberg 2014, pp. 107).

The cadastral map shows another feature of vital importance for the understanding of the setting: the north-south road passing close to the church. The excavations along the E6 showed that this forerunner to the freeway is part of a very old communication route crossing the plain bordering the Skanör peninsula (fig. 1). It may be thought of as a transisthmic route of special importance, connecting the Öresund strait with the

Fig. 4. Examples of West Slavic zoomorphic spurs and their fragments:

a) Lutomiersk, Poland.

After Nadolski et al. 1959, tab. XLIV.

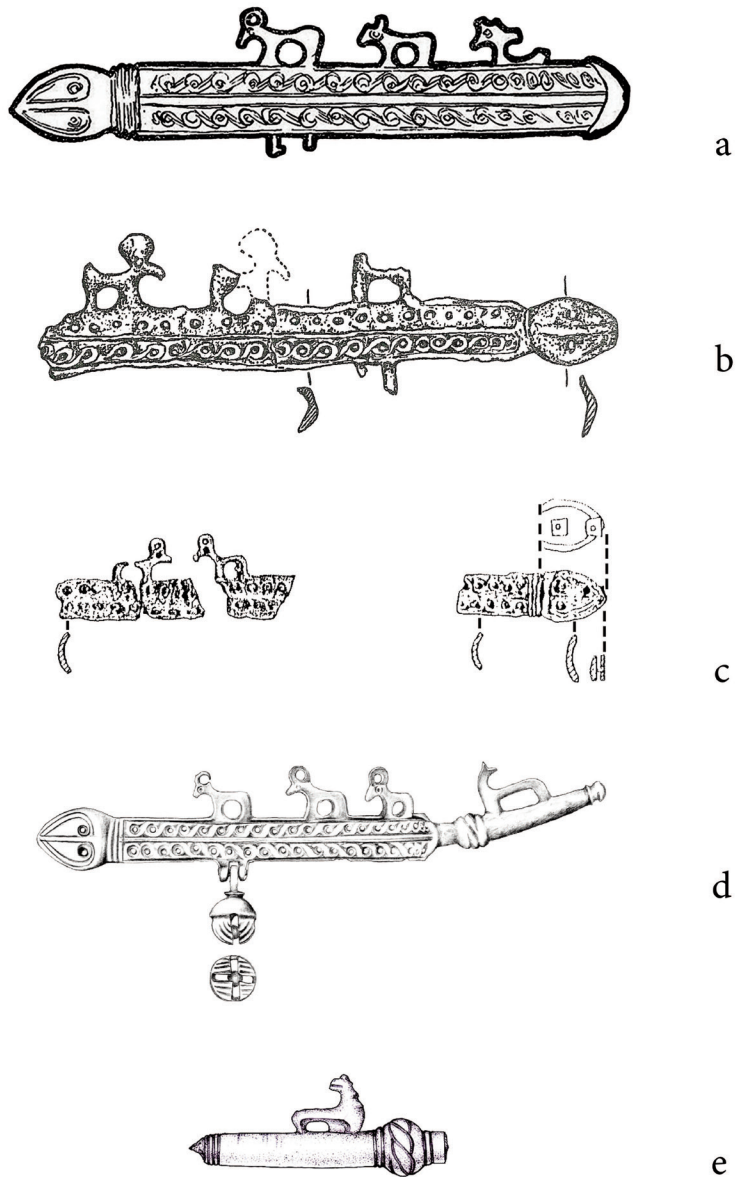
b) Wrocław Ostrów-Tumski. After Kaźmierczyk, Lasota 1979, tab. XVIII, Poland.

c) Cerkiewnik, Poland. After Ziemińska-Odoj 1992, p. 125.

d) Cieple, Poland. After Ratajczyk 2013b, p. 293, tab. 1.

e) Kumachevo, Sambia Peninsula, Russia. After Wadyl & Skvorcov 2018, p. 226, fig. 1.

Plate by Klaudia Karpińska.



Baltic Sea, one of a couple of routes over-land supposedly chosen in order to avoid the dangerous waters surrounding the Skanör peninsula (Magnusson Staaf 2016). The port of Trelleborg, today with ferries running to Germany and Poland, is another node in this route, 7–8 kilometres to the south-east from Skegrie.

#### *The goad from Skegrie and its parallels*

In view of its overall appearance, and given the particular details of its construction, it is clear that the Skegrie goad belongs to a very special type of West Slavic spurs known from several sites in the area of present-day Poland, but also from northeast Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) and the Sambia Peninsula (fig. 4). Over the years, artefacts of this kind have been given





Fig. 5. Artistic reconstruction of grave 10 from Lutomiersk, Poland. Illustration by Mirosław Kuźma. Copyright by Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma.

various labels such as “parade spurs” (Polish *ostrogi parade*) or “spurs of the Lutomiersk type” (Polish *ostrogi typu lutomierskiego*), but given their characteristic features, and especially the fact that their arms resemble snakes, in 2017 Leszek Gardeła, Kamil Kajkowski and Zdzisława Ratajczyk started calling them “zoomorphic spurs” (Gardeła & Kajkowski 2017, pp. 22–23). This is also the term that will be employed in the present paper.

The first four examples of zoomorphic spurs were discovered in the 1940s during archaeological excavations in an early medieval cemetery at Lutomiersk in Central Poland (Jażdżewski 1951; Nadolski et al. 1959). They were found in two separate graves, 5 and 10, a cremation and inhumation respectively, both of which were lavishly furnished with weapons and equestrian equipment (i.e. horse bridles with copper-alloy mounts and decorative bar bits, stirrups, saddles) (fig. 5). Because in both instances the spurs were fragmented and lacked the essential goads which would have made them functional, scholars were unsure about their actual purpose. In view of this uncertainty, and because the objects in question lay close to what was interpreted as saddle remains, a hypothesis was put forward that they had served not as spurs but rather as decorative “saddle mounts” (Jażdżewski 1951, pp. 119–120; Nadolski 1959, p. 58; Abramowicz 1962, p. 127). As we shall see below, for many following decades this misleading interpretation held strong in Polish archaeology.

The exceptionally rich contents of the Lutomiersk graves led their excavators and subsequent scholars to the assumption that the deceased had been elite warriors and/or riders who had served in the retinue of Bolesław the Brave of the Piast dynasty. Because at the time of their discovery the Lutomiersk spurs were unique in Poland, and because no stylistic parallels to their ornamental designs were known (apart from a decorative knife sheath from the cemetery at Brześć Kujawski – see Kaszewscy 1971), an argument was put forward that the spurs had originated from the Ural or from Rus’ (Jażdżewski 1951, p. 14; Nadolski 1959, pp. 58–59). Several decades later, scholars like Krzysztof Wachowski (2001, pp. 158, 169; 2006) and Michał Kara (1993, p. 40)

suggested that the spurs and/or the people buried with them had arrived from Scandinavia (Sweden), while Marcin Wołoszyn (2010, p. 312) thought they could have originated from the Baltic area. Ultimately, the idea of the eastern European provenance of the spurs, although based *purely* on conjecture and without *any* hard archaeological evidence to support it, gained the widest popularity in Polish scholarly milieus, leading to the false conviction that the cemetery at Lutomiersk was the final resting place of Varangian warriors with Scandinavian connections who had come to serve in the retinues of Polish rulers of the Piast dynasty (e.g. Wołoszyn 2010; Grygiel 2014; *contra* Rohrer 2012; Gardela 2017, pp. 61–63; 2018; in press; Ratajczyk et al. 2017).

The hypothesis that the spurs from Lutomiersk were of foreign provenance strongly influenced the interpretative trajectories developed by later generations of scholars who came across the remains of similar objects at various archaeological sites in Poland. In 1977, fragments of a spur of exactly the same type as those from Lutomiersk were unearthed at an early medieval stronghold at Ostrów Tumski in Wrocław, Silesia (southwest Poland) (Każmierczyk & Lasota 1979; Wachowski 2006). Based on the chronology of the layer in which the object had lain, the spur was dated between the tenth and eleventh centuries, a period which dovetails with the chronology of the earliest phases of the cemetery at Lutomiersk and which also matches the dating of the aforementioned graves 5 and 10. In 1990, another fragmentarily preserved zoomorphic spur was found in a cremation grave (no. 7) in the cemetery at Cerkiewnik in Warmia (northeast Poland) (Ziemlińska-Odoj 1992). The grave was heavily disturbed by intensive agricultural work, but what remained of it was remarkably rich; in addition to the fragmented spur (again, lacking the goad), the grave contained numerous pottery shards from various types of vessels, an iron knife, some small objects of iron resembling rim-mounts (fragments of a plate or shield, perhaps), an iron buckle, as well as other tiny pieces of metal. Remarkably, two pig ribs were also found in the burial pit, as well as some horse bones. The sex of the deceased could not be determined with certainty, but the age of this individual was estimated at

*adultus-maturus*. Like other scholars before her, Włodzimiera Ziemlińska-Odoj (1992), the archaeologist who published the site report, was unable to determine the cultural provenance of the zoomorphic spur.

The major interpretational breakthrough came in 2009 when Zdzisława Ratajczyk discovered a lavishly furnished chamber grave in an early medieval inhumation cemetery at Cieple in Eastern Pomerania (Ratajczyk 2013a; 2013b; Ratajczyk et al. 2017). The grave, labelled 42/2009, contained the skeletal remains of an adult man accompanied by a vast repertoire of objects. At the man's right arm lay a richly decorated sword (Jan Petersen's type Z) and a spearhead, and at the waist a phyllite whetstone was placed. In the foot-end of the grave lay a set of two stirrups, a large bucket with iron hoops, as well as an iron horse bit and a buckle, probably representing the remains of a bridle. The most striking aspect of this grave, however, was that the man had been buried with zoomorphic spurs of exactly the same type as those from Lutomiersk, Ostrów Tumski and Cerkiewnik, which, in this particular case, were found on his feet. Remarkably, the spurs survived intact, together with zoomorphic goads, strap mounts, belt ends and small decorative bells which, even after a thousand years since the moment of their deposition, still produce a sound (fig. 6). In her first articles concerning the finds from Cieple, Zdzisława Ratajczyk was careful in drawing conclusions about the cultural origin of the zoomorphic spurs (Ratajczyk 2013a; 2013b). Today, she shares the opinion advocated by the authors of the present paper that the spurs are West Slavic products (Ratajczyk et al. 2017).

Apart from the goad from Skegrie, over the last decade three other fragments of zoomorphic spurs have been found. These include a goad with a backwards-looking horse from Lubniewice in the vicinity of Gorzów Wielkopolski in Lubuskie Voivodeship, Poland (Gardela 2017, p. 63; Ratajczyk et al. 2017, p. 33; Michalak & Gardela in press), a zoomorphic buckle from Schwerin in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany (Konze & Ruchöft 2017; the object is analogous to the spur buckles discovered at Lutomiersk and Cieple), and a goad from Kumachevo in the Sambia Peninsula, Russia (Wadył & Skvorcov 2018). A curious and as of





Fig. 6. Copper-alloy spur from Cieple. Photo: Jarosław Strobin. Copyright by Zdzisława Ratajczyk. Used by kind permission.

yet unpublished object in the form of a four-legged horned animal found at Jerzwałd is also possibly part of a zoomorphic spur. Interestingly, all goads discovered so far have iron cores/rivets, suggesting that they were made in the same workshop or at least according to the same technological principle.

After a generally positive reception of a series of recent studies by Leszek Gardela, Kamil Kajkowski, and Zdzisława Ratajczyk (Ratajczyk et al. 2017; Gardela 2018), Polish and international scholars seem to have now reached a consensus and they are confident about the West Slavic origin of the zoomorphic spurs (e.g. Błaszczuk 2017; Wadyl & Skvorcov 2018). The wider symbolic and social implications of this interpretative shift are discussed further below.

#### *Horses, snakes and cattle – The symbolism of the zoomorphic spurs*

The goad from Skegrie is decorated with a figurative representation of a horse. In Indo-European mythologies, this animal played an exceptional role and was often endowed with ambivalent characteristics. On the one hand, the horse was identified with the sun and its movement across

the sky, and on the other hand it was an animal with a particular connection to aspects of dying and death. It was also believed that the physical characteristics of horses, especially their remarkable speed and vitality, predestined them to maintain contact with the supernatural world, as well as giving them the ability to move between the different spheres of the cosmos. These associations made horses become messengers between gods and people, and intermediaries between the domain of the dead and the world of the living (Eliade 1994, p. 436; Cooper 1998, p. 115; Drews 2004; Anthony 2007; Gapski 2014).

Essentially, all these characteristics of horses also find their expression in the pre-Christian worldviews of early medieval Western Slavs and are corroborated by a broad range of archaeological, textual, and ethnographic sources. Medieval chroniclers provide exceptionally detailed accounts of the roles of these animals, although their texts concern almost exclusively the coastal zone of the West Slavic area (Pomerania and northern Polabia; i.e. the area of present-day northern Poland and Germany respectively). Extant accounts portray horses as mediatory and prophetic animals whose help is required to reveal the will of

the gods regarding affairs important for the whole community, especially when it comes to decisions concerning war and peace.

In *Gesta Danorum*, the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus describes a divination ritual which allegedly took place at Arkona, the major stronghold and temple of the West Slavic tribe of Rugians (Saxo XIV, 39.10; see text and translation in Friis-Jensen & Fisher 2015, pp. 1273–1282). The ritual involved leading a saddled but unmounted horse over a row of spears, in an attempt to determine if the tribe should undertake a military campaign. The horse was attributed to Sventovit (a god of war and probably a hypostasis of the East Slavic deity Perun), and it was the god himself who was believed to ride it during the ceremony. In addition to describing this ritual in detail, Saxo also observes that each morning Sventovit's horse was found covered with mud (Saxo XIV, 39.9). As the chronicler explains, in the opinion of the pagan folk, every night the god rode his steed to “wage war against the opponents of his religion” (trans. after Friis-Jensen & Fisher 2015, p. 1281). By telling this story, Saxo incidentally gives us a glimpse into what may have been part of a mythical narrative about the nighttime journeys of the Slavic war god. The details of this narrative are now lost, but it is quite likely that the story concerned the everlasting cosmological battle for the sun which ensued between two divine antagonists – a motif to which we will return further below.

The events recorded by Saxo find a close analogy in *Heinrici Chronicon Lyvonie* where analogous ritual activities in the Baltic region of Livonia are described (Brundage 2003) and where the pagan god also “leads” the divination. In this light, it is probable that, at least among the Early medieval communities from the southern Baltic area, prophetic rituals involving horses had similar mythical undertones (Modzelewski 2004, pp. 387–388).

When these and other relevant textual accounts are taken collectively, it appears that among the Slavs horses were believed to have had the capacity to travel between the worlds and that they served as mediators between the different spheres of the cosmos. Further support for the idea of the mediatory role of these animals is also

provided by archaeological discoveries, especially in the form of deposits of complete horse skeletons and so-called “foundation sacrifices”. Traces of such ritual activities are well-known from the entire West Slavic area and are dated to the period surrounding the religious conversion from paganism to Christianity. It is worth noting in this context that the vast majority of traces of these practices are known from what can be regarded as liminal locations (Kajkowski 2016; 2018), a fact which lends even further support for the idea that in the West Slavic world horses had a mediatory role to play. The prominent role of the horse is also seen in West Slavic eschatological beliefs and in funerary practices. Here the horse functioned not only as a soul carrier (*psychopompos*), but also symbolized the transition to another level of the cosmos and, consequently, to another world. There are strong reasons to believe that some of the religious concepts outlined above also found their reflection in the meaning-content of the horse portrayed on the goad from Skegrie.

A more comprehensive understanding of the goad from Skegrie becomes possible when we consider it in the context of the complete set of zoomorphic spurs discovered at Cieple in 2009. Detailed analyses of the iconographic content of these objects have allowed to put forward the hypothesis that they referred to Slavic pre-Christian ideas of the cosmos (Ratajczyk et al. 2017; Gardela 2018; Gardela et al. in press) and that they could be “read” like a narrative. There are strong reasons to believe that at the core of the narrative was the so-called “cosmogonic myth” – an attempt to explain the genesis and cohesion of the world and the various mechanisms governing its existence. In religious studies, several different variants of the cosmogonic myth are known, one of which involves the recovery the pre-matter from primeval waters by the “earth-diver” (Dundes 1962). It is precisely this kind of cosmogonic myth that seems to have existed among the pagan Slavic communities and which also appears to be depicted on the spurs under consideration.

The Slavic cosmogonic myth survives in multiple variants in nineteenth and early twentieth century folklore, and its basic features have been carefully reconstructed by Ryszard Tomicki as a

result of groundbreaking ethnographic analyses (Tomicki 1976; see also Tomiccy 1975). In Tomicki's view, there are very strong reasons to believe that the myth dates back to pre-Christian times. While retrospective approaches to pagan religions – relying on chronologically removed sources, often deriving from Christian contexts – have to be approached with caution (for thorough methodological discussions, see Heide and Bek-Pedersen 2014), there is compelling archaeological evidence (not just in the form of the spurs discussed here) that the myth was indeed widely known among Western Slavs in the Viking Age.

According to the most basic version of the Slavic cosmogonic myth, the act of the world's creation was attributed to two supernatural antagonists, in extant folkloristic accounts known as God and the Devil, but originally, in pre-Christian times, probably representing the uranic god Perun and the chthonic-aquatic god Weles (Tomiccy 1975, pp. 24–25; Tomicki 1976; Szyjewski 2003, pp. 27–38, 59–64; see also Tomicki 1979). After picking up a grain of soil from the abyss and using it to form a primordial island, the two deities (or, in some variants of the cosmogonic myth, their supernatural helpers in zoomorphic form) engage in a never-ending struggle for world domination. In this conflict, neither of the two antagonists ever wins and the tides of victory constantly shift from one side to the other. It appears, therefore, that for the Slavs the cosmic conflict was something without which the world would cease to exist.

In the context of our discussion, two aspects of this myth are important to emphasise. The first one concerns the place of residence of the two antagonists, i.e. the opposing spheres of heaven and the underground (underwater), suggesting a dichotomous structure of Slavic mythology (Tomiccy 1975, pp. 52–60; Szyjewski 2003, pp. 39–42). The second issue concerns the corporeal form which the gods (and their helpers) were imagined to have. In light of the accounts available to us today, there are strong reasons to believe that the gods and/or their helpers had hybrid shapes reminiscent of snakes (Tomicki 1974; Urbańczyk 1991, p. 33). Toponymic evidence and folkloristic accounts from the West Slavic area preserve the name of one of these creatures; it was

known as *Žmij* and often had the combined physical characteristics of a snake and a bird (gander, crane or eagle) (Tomicki 1974; Tomiccy 1975, pp. 54–55, 57). In folklore, *Žmij* is described as a fiery serpent associated with Perun and the sky, but he is also seen as the bringer of wealth and fertility. His main antagonists are water snakes, associated with the chthonic god Weles, which have the capacity to steal and absorb water, in effect causing drought and famine. Anyone familiar with pre-Christian religious concepts will immediately notice that the conflict between the gods (and consequently their supernatural serpentine helpers) refers to the changing of the seasons, when light (personified by Perun) cyclically competes with darkness (personified by Weles) (Lyle 2008; 2009; Pócs 2015).

It is highly probable that supernatural snakes associated with Perun and Weles are also shown on the zoomorphic spurs that occupy us here. We argue that the celestial *Žmij* is depicted on the strap-fittings (portraying a winged creature) and that the chthonic and water-absorbing snakes are shown on the buckle (fig. 7a–b). The fact that the buckle and the fittings are part of one fastening mechanism (without which the spur would simply not hold on the rider's foot), and that they interlock (as if the creatures depicted on them were engaged in a fight or struggle), can have both a practical/functional and a metaphorical meaning; in portraying the everlasting battle between the supernatural antagonists, the scene emphasises that without this conflict the world would cease to exist (i.e. the spur would fall off the rider's foot).

It is also significant to observe that the zoomorphic spurs display various other details probably referring to how the underworld and afterlife were imagined to be. In light of what we know about Slavic mythology (e.g. Ivanov & Toporov 1974; Uspieński 1985; Urbańczyk 1991; Szyjewski 2003; Gieysztor 2006; Kajkowski 2017), the horned animals shown on the arms of the spurs can be interpreted as human souls which, in the afterlife, were believed to take the form of cattle (grazing on a meadow, usually located on an island), whereas the snake-shaped heads at the terminals of the spurs can be seen to represent Weles, the sovereign of the chthonic world. In



Fig. 7a. Replica of the copper-alloy spur from Cieple by Tomasz Czyszczoń. Photo: Tomasz Czyszczoń. Used by kind permission.



Fig. 7b. Details of the replica of the copper-alloy spur from Cieple showing the fastening mechanism. Photo: Bartosz Ligocki. Used by kind permission.



this light, the ring/disc with a swastika motif attached to the spur-strap can perhaps be interpreted as a reference to the sky god Perun or another supreme deity that ruled over the celestial sphere.

Returning to the horse shown on the goad, we believe that this animal might be standing on a shore, with the water in front of it (represented by the wavy lines on the spur's arms) serving as a border between the worlds of the living and the dead. The way the horse is depicted, with its head turned backwards, can be read as an attempt to emphasise the animal's capacity to transgress both worlds, while the position of the goad at a low slope angle in relation to the rest of the spur could suggest that the path to the otherworld leads downwards. In light of all this, the most compelling interpretation of the horse shown on the goad seems to be as a soul carrier and/or as an animal with a mediatory function; i.e. one that facilitates communication between the worlds. In light of the above, therefore, we argue that the zoomorphic spurs can be interpreted as models of the Slavic cosmos.

Although the exceptionally detailed iconographic programme shown on the zoomorphic spurs remains unprecedented as a whole, analogies to some of their details can be found in other West Slavic objects. The closest parallels are displayed by the copper-alloy knife sheath fitting from Starigard-Oldenburg in Germany (Gabriel 2000, p. 139), dated to the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century. The fitting is adorned with anthropo- and zoomorphic figures positioned on either side of a vertical rod, forming an axis of the whole composition (perhaps, in a symbolic sense, referring to the world-axis). The find from Oldenburg, together with similar sheaths (albeit with somewhat simplified ornaments) known predominantly from the area of today's Poland (fig. 8), is considered by some scholars as a model of the Slavic cosmos (e.g. Biermann 2014; Gardeła 2017, pp. 55–61; Szczepanik 2017). In this light, it is not unlikely that knives with anthropo- and zoomorphic decorations (the iconographic details of which may have also been further expanded on their, now decayed, organic handles) served as symbols of particular identity and social status. This view is

also supported by the contexts of their discovery and by the fact that they often come from graves with remarkably rich furnishings.

Similarly to the knife sheaths, as objects associated with equestrian warriors, the zoomorphic spurs may have also served as symbols of status, additionally manifesting a very particular identity of their users. In the West Slavic world there is a long tradition of producing and using lavishly decorated riding equipment, the spurs of the Great Moravian elites of the ninth century being the best examples (Kouřil 2017). Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic decorations depicting humanoid figures are also portrayed on a recently emerging and previously unknown type of spur goads known from Groß Strömkendorf and Seehausen, both in Germany (Gabriel & Muhl 2014; Schirren 2016), and from Cotes, Charnwood in Leicestershire, England (Christie et al. 2007, p. 219). Although some scholars consider goads of this type as Scandinavian products (Schirren 2016), in view of their stylistic similarities to various West Slavic objects we would rather argue for their provenance in the West Slavic area. So far, no complete spurs to which such goads originally belonged have been found, but it is not unlikely that their complete iconographic programme was complementary to that shown on the zoomorphic spurs of the Lutomiersk type discussed in the present article. If it was indeed so, this would even further emphasise the existence of a shared West Slavic worldview regardless of territorial or tribal divides.

In the following section of this paper, in concert with the interpretations suggested above, we will focus our attention on the deeper meanings animals and animal motifs may have had in forging West Slavic identities, and we will explore the roles they played in strengthening the bonds between the members of their militarized elites.

#### *Zoomorphic art as an expression of West Slavic ingroup identification*

The period spanning the tenth to eleventh centuries saw profound cultural and ideological transformations, both in Scandinavia and in the West Slavic area. At roughly the same time, towards the end of the tenth century, Scandinavian and West Slavic elites began to develop political and ideological strategies which ultimately led to the



Fig. 8. Examples of West Slavic copper-alloy knife sheaths from Germany and Poland:

a) Oldenburg, Germany. After Gabriel 2000, p. 139.

b) Ostrów Lednicki, Poland.

After Gardela 2017, p. 58.

c-d) Brześć Kujawski, Poland.

After Kaszewscy 1971, p. 389,

tab. VI, fig. 7 and Biermann

2014, p. 395, fig. 8.

e) Kałdus, Poland. After

Chudziak 2001, p. 79,

fig. 11a.

f) Schwedt, Germany. After

Biermann 2014, p. 395, fig. 8.

Plate by Klaudia Karpieńska.



a



b



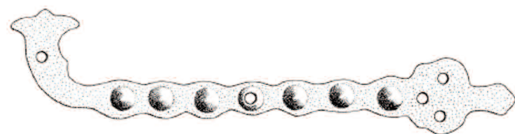
c



d



e



f

formation of early states (e.g. Dobat 2009). The process of transformation from tribal to feudal societies was very turbulent, however, and would not have been possible to accomplish without resorting to military power; prospective Scandinavian and West Slavic rulers forged their authority by relying on well-armed and well-trained

warriors, who shared a common vision or at least a common economic goal. Essential to the success of their endeavours were not only their skills in battle, but also very particular ideologies which motivated them to act.

A recent study by Ben Raffield, Claire Greenlow, Neil Price and Mark Collard (2016) has fo-

cused on aspects of ingroup identification and identity fusion in the formation of Viking war bands. Using textual sources and archaeological evidence, and referring to the latest advancements in psychology and anthropology of group dynamics, they explore how loyalty to the group was achieved and what conditions had to be met to ensure the group's success. Their work develops the concept of "ingroup identification" which is defined as "a process of social categorization in which a particular ingroup is included in an individual's concept of self" (Raffield et al. 2016, p. 37). In Viking warbands, it is argued, group identity and cohesion was forged and maintained through oaths, shared ideologies and through the use of specific types of "material markers" (clothing, weapons etc.). Similar behaviour can be seen in modern times, for example in the "colour schemes adopted by sports teams, the uniforms and regimental insignia of military units and the clothing styles adopted by modern sub-cultures such as punks, goths and mods" (Raffield et al. 2016, p. 40).

In full agreement with the arguments put forward by Raffield et al. (2016), we argue that the West Slavic zoomorphic spurs, together with other distinctive "material markers" (like the knife sheaths mentioned above), manifested particular group identity; an identity the foundation of which was the common origin (mythical and cultural) of its members and a shared ideology deeply rooted in pre-Christian religious concepts.

In the discussion above we have already highlighted the stylistic and conceptual parallels that exist between the zoomorphic spurs and some of the copper-alloy knife scabbards from the West Slavic area, arguing that they all referred to pre-Christian cosmological ideas. In analysing their iconographic programme, we have also pointed out the importance of animals, especially horses and snakes. Recent surveys of various categories of objects from Poland and Polabia show that it is the serpentine motifs that feature most prominently on high-status weaponry, equestrian equipment and jewellery in these areas (Gardeła 2018; Gardeła & Kajkowski forthcoming). In light of the great importance of these animals in the Slavic cosmogonic myth, and bearing in mind the fact that the snake known as Žmij was strictly

associated with the war god Perun, there are strong reasons to believe that in the late tenth and eleventh centuries this particular supernatural creature functioned as the emblem of a very particular ingroup among West Slavic elites. This could have been a group associated with some prominent military leader, who distributed high-status military equipment among his followers. In our view, the person who lost(?) the spur goad in Skegrie was very likely part of that ingroup. The wider context in which this person may have operated is outlined in the final section below.

### *Conclusions: West Slavic presence in the Skegrie-Trelleborg area*

In the town of Trelleborg there are traces of a seasonally used coastal settlement of considerable size, dating to ca AD 700–1000 AD (Jacobsson 1999; 2003). A contemporary permanent settlement with large halls is situated two kilometres to the north (Carlie 2008; Björk et al. 2009) and halfway in between there is a burial place called *Vannhög* (Ahlström Arcini 2018). Finally, a Viking Age ringfort – *trelleborgen* – at the coastal settlement is a sign of special functions in the area (Jacobsson 1999; 2003). The dating of the fort is somewhat disputed, but it was clearly built in two phases. The first phase dates to the late ninth or the beginning of the tenth century, and the second phase may coincide with the reign of Harald Bluetooth, AD 958–986 (Jacobsson 1999; cf. Borring Olesen 2000; Ödman 2018). The function of the fort is obscure, and may have changed from phase 1 to phase 2. Recently, Anders Ödman has suggested that the ringforts in south-west Scania – Trelleborg and Borgeby – were inspired by Frisian and Slavic strongholds and originally built by local magnates who used them in their trade with slaves and other goods (Ödman 2018, p. 153; cf. Dobat 2009).

The occurrence of early Slavic pottery of the Feldberg and Fresendorf types at the coastal settlement as well as the ringfort have been interpreted as evidence of Slavic presence in connection with exchange and trade networks as early as the eighth century and in the following decades (Brorsson 2003). Pottery of the same type has been found at excavations of a site at Östra Grevie further inland from Skegrie (Brorsson 2017, pp. 96), sug-

gesting that it was more widely spread in the area than previously thought.

In a recent study of eight Viking Age burial places in Sweden, Caroline Ahlström Arcini (2018) has made use of strontium analysis on a large number of buried individuals. The burial site *Vannhög* at Trelleborg, c. AD 700–950, is one of the chosen places. According to Ahlström Arcini's estimations, 41% of the buried individuals were non-local. The low strontium values pinpointing most of the non-locals fit well with values measured at the coast south of the Baltic, although other regions have low values as well. At the moment there is no way to determine for sure whether the non-local individuals buried at *Vannhög* actually were of Slavic origin. However, taking geography and early Slavic pottery at the coastal settlement as well as the ringfort into account, the probability is high and generally supported by the fact that, compared to the analysed burial places further north in Sweden, low strontium values occur in the largest proportions at *Vannhög* and the early Christian graveyard at the Trinitatis church in Lund (Ahlström Arcini 2018, p. 46).

The Trinitatis graveyard was in use c. AD 990–1050/60, and the estimated number of non-local individuals is no less than 75%. Furthermore, individuals with low values were buried on the edges of the graveyard and certain specific funeral customs were documented in some of the graves (Ahlström Arcini 2018, p. 51). Scholars agree that the town of Lund was originally founded as a royal demesne at the end of the tenth century, expanding with the aid of people from different regions (cf. Carelli 2012; Roslund 2012). At about the same time the Baltic ware was introduced, originating from a late Slavic regional pottery tradition on the island of Rügen and its hinterland south of the Baltic (Roslund 2001; 2007; 2012). The sudden and widespread distribution – the “black wave” of Baltic ware – in southwest Scania and Lund has been much debated over the years, and it is highly reasonable, as Mats Roslund (2001, p. 321) suggests, to link such a massive change in the material culture to a major political change. The expanding Jelling dynasty gained territorial dominance in south-west Scania at the time, and was also heavily engaged in

the political development south of the Baltic through marriage alliances. Harald Bluetooth was married to Tove, the daughter of the Obodrite ruler Mistivoj. According to Adam of Bremen, towards the end of his life Harald fled to *Jumne* (Wolin?) in Slavic territory after being defeated by his son Svein Forkbeard, who was married to Gunhild, the daughter of a West Slavic noble (Randsborg 1980, p. 22; Morawiec 2010; see also Price et al. 2011).

Roslund suggests that prisoners of war, among them potters, were brought to south-west Scania as a result of the war that the Obodrites supported by Danes waged against neighbouring tribes. There was a great demand for agrarian labour force and artisans when a network of royal demesnes and magnate farms were established (Roslund 2001, pp. 248, 321; cf. Andrén 1983; Ödman 2018).

Returning to the Skegrie–Trelleborg area, a royal demesne in Gylle close to Trelleborg is known from written sources, c. AD 1230 (KVj *Kong Valdemars jordebog*). Presumed Late Viking Age magnate's farms may be traced from the distributions of rune stones, for example two stones in Fuglie close to Skegrie, and, most interesting in this context, the silver hoards (Hårdh 1976; Randsborg 1980; Anglert 1995). No less than twelve hoards containing Slavic silver in southern Scania are dated *tpq* AD 983–1047, one of them in Lilla Slågarp near Trelleborg (Helgesson 2008). It has been noted that most of them, the Lilla Slågarp hoard included, also contain Ethelred coins, indicating that the magnates also received Danegeld (Helgeson 2008, p. 60).

Summing up the evidence outlined above, Slavic presence in the Skegrie–Trelleborg area has deep roots. From the early phase and onwards it was linked to the exchange and trade networks operating across the Baltic, although a broader basis for interaction must be considered (Callmer 1992; Hårdh 1996; Jensen 2004). Several scholars have emphasized the importance of the slave trade, especially in the turbulent state formation period in the late tenth and eleventh centuries (Roslund 2001; Jensen 2004; Ödman 2018). It is argued that the ringforts in Scania were closely linked to the slave trade, and the presumed Slavic island settlement at Mölleholmen

in south-east Scania is reinterpreted as a transit-camp for slaves (Ödman 2018) rather than a settlement of colonizing migrants (Kelm 2000).

Apart from a variety of pottery and some hoards, there is a lack of artefacts with a potential to deepen our perspectives on interaction between Scandinavians and Slavs in south-west Scania. In addition to the lavishly decorated T-shaped/long-bladed axe from Lund (with parallels at Trelleborg in Denmark, as well as in Poland and Polabia – see Paulsen 1956, pp. 159–163; Gardela 2015, pp. 223–225; Kotowicz 2018, pp. 91, 97, 100), the copper-alloy goad from Skegrie is a rare example of a high-status West Slavic object from this area. The finding place, close to a supposed magnate's farm, strategically situated at a communication route, is not random, however, suggesting that the contacts between Scania and what is today the area of Poland were maintained on various social levels. As outlined above, these contacts may have involved trade (also slave trade), exchange, but also political alliances and exogamous marriages. The person who lost(?) the lavishly decorated goad may have been a West Slavic emissary, a member of an elite group of equestrian warriors (perhaps associated with the Piast dynasty) and/or a mercenary who came to Scandinavia to fulfil an important mission.

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